



TULAREMIA

Tularemia, also known as “rabbit fever,” is an infectious disease caused by a hardy bacterium, *Francisella tularensis*. It is found typically in wild animals (especially rodents, rabbits and hares) but occasionally in pet animals, such as cats. Tularemia is a rural disease and occurs in all states except Hawaii.

Infection

People can get tularemia many different ways, such as through the bite of an infected insect or other arthropod (usually a tick or deerfly), handling infected animal carcasses, eating or drinking contaminated food or water or breathing in *F. tularensis* bacteria. In the United States, tularemia is almost always a rural disease. People who spend a great deal of time outdoors or have occupational exposure risks are at greater risk of infection (hunters, laboratory workers, etc.).

Symptoms

Symptoms of tularemia could include sudden fever, chills, headaches, muscle aches, joint pain, dry cough, progressive weakness and sometimes pneumonia. People who have pneumonia can develop chest pain and bloody sputum and can have trouble breathing. Other symptoms of tularemia depend upon how a person was exposed to the tularemia bacteria. These symptoms can include ulcers on the skin, swollen and painful lymph glands, swollen and painful eyes, and a severe sore throat. Symptoms usually appear three to five days after exposure to the bacteria, but can take as long as 14 days.

Treatment

Tularemia is not known to be spread from person to person, so people who have tularemia do not need to be isolated. Antibiotics such as streptomycin and tetracycline are effective in treating those infected with the organism. People who have been exposed to *F. tularensis* should be treated as soon as possible. The disease can be severe or even fatal if it is not treated with the appropriate antibiotics. Those who have been infected may possess life-long immunity.

Vaccination/Prophylaxis

A vaccine for tularemia is under review by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and is not currently available in the United States.

For more information, call the North Dakota Department of Health at 701.328.2378.